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The Statue of Unity: Is it selective amnesia or double-speak of the BJP-RSS?

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By **Abhay Kumar**

Inaugurating the tallest statue of freedom fighter and the senior Congress leader Sardar Patel, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacked his opponents for playing politics: “I am amazed when some people of our own country dared to see this initiative from a political view and criticize us as if we have committed a huge crime. Is remembering the country’s great personalities a crime?” The senior RSS leader Manmohan Vaidya was soon to dole out sermon to his opponents, saying that the construction of Rs 3000-crore statue of Patel was in national interest and one should not play politics over this.

If the construction of Rs. 3000 crore statue of Patel is in national interest, then what about 75000 lives of Adivasis, who are badly affected by this project?

Our media and state intellectuals are not interested in raising these issues. For them, toeing the line and the order from the government and boss is a road to success and corridor to power.

As a result, the dark side of the Status of Unity project is yet to be adequately understood. Unfortunately, the media and civil society have failed to stand with thousands of Adivasis who have protested, got detained.

It is not much reported that they observed the day of inauguration as a black day. One can feel their anger: they did not cook food to express their mourning and anger.

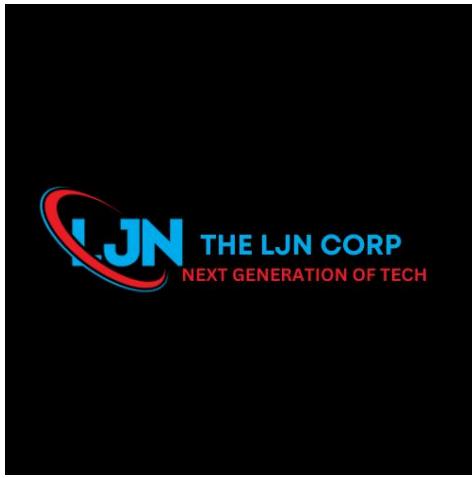
Undoubtedly, the anger of Adivasis is justified. In the process of the construction of the Statue, their lands have been snatched and the natural resources have been plundered and destroyed. This project has benefited several private companies and ensured big profits for politicians and bureaucrats. In the name of national interest, these all have happened. At the cost of the lives of the most vulnerable in our society, the national pride has been achieved. By destroying their lives, Sardar’s statue has been erected.

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‘What is there for us?’ ‘How is this project going to address our socio-economic problems?’ These are the questions of the sufferers and victims of the project. But they largely remain ignored. Can anyone ask Modi and Vaidya this question: Is raising these issues really against national interest?

When the Hindutva forces came under criticism and anger of people, they started propagating stories that a lot of revenues will be generated out of the ticket price of the visitors at the Statue of Unity. If construction of statue and temples generates huge revenues, then the rich countries would have built millions of such statues in their country. If this had been the case, the USA or China would have raised the Statue of Liberty and China Wall to the level of the moon.

With the help of media, the Hindutva forces are spreading the rumours that building of statues are good for economy and a mark of national pride. But the political commentators have not forgotten that the BJP spoke just the opposite seven years ago and attacked Ms. Mayawati for building the statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Addressing a rally of SCs and STs in Sonebhadra in the eastern Uttar Pradesh, the then BJP president Nitin Gadkari came down heavily on Mayawati for constructing the statue and memorial of Ambedkar and park which cost around 600 crores. He argued that by constructing such statues, she was doing disservice to Dalits as this public money would have been spent on people’s welfare.

Now the BJP does not want to recall what it said in regards to Ambedkar’s statues. If spending around 600 crores was unjustified, how could the BJP and the RSS now justify spending five times more public money on building a statue?

The BJP is so intolerant and authoritarian that it does not want its opponents to remind itself of what it said seven years ago.

Is it selective amnesia or double-speak of the BJP-RSS?

Bio:

Abhay Kumar has recently submitted his PhD at Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His broad areas of interest are the Indian Muslims and social justice. His other writings are available at <http://www.abhaykumar.org>

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